

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Takeo Yamato

Takeo Yamato, third of four children, was born in 1932 in Kohala, Hawai‘i Island. His father, Shinji Yamato, a machinist/arc welder for Kohala Sugar Company, continued his skilled trade on Lāna‘i when he found employment with Hawaiian Pineapple Company in 1934. His mother, Miyono Yamato, did the laundry of bachelor laborers and worked in the pineapple fields.

As a youth, Takeo Yamato also worked in the pineapple fields—cutting grass, picking and carrying out fruit. He attended Lāna‘i High and Elementary School.

Graduating in 1950, he was employed by contractors, Western Builders. He worked on the Dole Administration Building in Lāna‘i City.

Later, he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force that stationed him in various places, including Guam and Japan.

Discharged in 1960, he worked for Ralph’s Grocery Co. Bakery in California for thirty years.

In 1991, he returned to Lāna‘i to look after his elderly parents. He also worked in maintenance and housekeeping at the Mānele Bay Hotel.

Since 1997, Takeo Yamato devotes his time to crafting wood canes and other objects.

Tape No. 56-41-1-14

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Takeo Yamato (TY)

Lānaʻi City, Lānaʻi

July 16, 2014

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: Today is July 16, 2014 and I'm interviewing Takeo Yamato at the Lānaʻi Senior Center. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Mr. Yamato, good morning.

TY: Good morning.

WN: The question I have for you—first one—can you tell me the year you were born?

TY: Nineteen thirty-two.

WN: Where were you born?

TY: Kohala, Big Island.

WN: What was your father or your parents doing in Kohala?

TY: My father was a machinist and welder for the Kohala Sugar Company.

WN: What was your father's name?

TY: His name was Shinji.

WN: S-H-I-N-J-I?

TY: Yeah.

WN: Yamato. You told me last time that he is *nisei*. Second generation. He was born and raised in Hawaiʻi.

TY: Yeah. Big Island. Anyway, I guess most people would not admit it and would not tell you this, but—we were in Kohala, actually Pā‘auhau. It’s a small village next to Honoka‘a. My grandfather was a scoundrel. (Laughs) He was actually taking money from my father. My father quit school at fifteen, and he started working for the sugar company. Every month, he [i.e., TY’s grandfather] would take a big chunk of his [i.e., TY’s father] paycheck so that he could buy alcohol. He was a drinker. He needed money for gambling. He liked to gamble. He had an eye on the ladies too. (Laughs) So he was a scoundrel.

WN: Did you ever meet him?

TY: Yeah. I met him. But, of course, I didn’t know anything. Anyway, my father moved the family from Pā‘auhau to Kohala, thinking that the distance that he put between him and his father would prevent him from coming every month. But no, he came every month (laughs) to collect his due from my father. So, my mother was mad as all hell, but she couldn’t do anything. So, she was taking in laundry to make ends meet. Then I was born in Kohala. At the time they were living in Kohala when I was born. Two years later, they couldn’t stand it no more, so they packed up and moved to Lāna‘i.

WN: I see. Do you know what part of Kohala?

TY: Hala‘ula. I don’t even know where that is. But I was told I was born not too far from the statue of [King] Kamehameha I. I guess he was born over there too, King Kamehameha. I’ve seen the statue once since. (Chuckles) That’s how we wound up in Lāna‘i.

WN: Again, what was your mother’s name?

TY: Her name was Miyono.

WN: Miyono, okay.

TY: Isuzu.

WN: Isuzu.

TY: Yeah.

WN: Yamato, yeah. Okay, so you were born in 1932 in Kohala, and when you were two years old the family came to Lāna‘i.

TY: To Lāna‘i.

WN: Did he ever tell you specifics as to why he moved?

TY: My mother told me. Even relating the story, I could see her getting so mad. After all these years, she was still pissed (laughs) so to speak. She was telling me that they all lived in Pā‘auhau right close to my grandparents. Because he was always, every month, taking money from them, they moved to Kohala. Even that wasn’t enough and he still came. In those days they didn’t have buses. Even today I don’t think they have a regular bus schedule running along the coast there. But he was still coming to collect.

WN: So when you say your mom was pissed, was she pissed for having to come to Lāna‘i?

TY: No, no. Just because he was taking their money. They had a couple of kids by that time but he was still coming to take money.

WN: That’s a scoundrel. (Laughs)

TY: Yeah. That’s a good definition of a scoundrel. (WN laughs.)

WN: So I guess they were able to get away from him permanently by coming here.

TY: Yeah. When they moved here, he’s not going to get on the steamer once a month just to collect his due.

WN: That’s interesting. Of all the people I’ve interviewed, I don’t know if I’ve interviewed anyone whose parents came to another part of Hawai‘i to get away from their parents and in-laws. It’s interesting.

(Laughter)

So when they came here and you were born in ’32, and you came here in ’34, what kind of work was your father doing here?

TY: He was doing the same thing. He was a machinist and an arc welder for the maintenance building right down on Lāna‘i Avenue.

WN: You mean this is for Hawaiian Pine[apple Company]?

TY: Yeah.

WN: So he was a skilled laborer then?

TY: Yeah.

WN: So he was a machinist for the Kohala [Sugar Company] plantation.

TY: And during the war [i.e., World War II], heck he worked Saturdays and Sundays in the pineapple fields. Seven days a week.

WN: You mean just picking?

TY: Everything. Picking, weeding, whatever they assigned them to do on Saturdays and Sundays. I don't know how long, but for a while—for quite a while—he used to go to work Saturdays and Sundays. Monday through Friday he worked at his regular job.

WN: What about your mother? Did she work for the company?

TY: My mother worked in the pineapple fields too.

WN: As far as you remember growing up, where did you folks live? Where was your home?

TY: We had a house maybe about four or five blocks from where I live now on Lāna'i Avenue. We moved over there to that house during the war.

WN: You mean the house you live in now, you lived in during the war?

TY: Yeah.

WN: Wow, you've been there a long time then.

TY: Nineteen forty-four or [nineteen] forty-five we moved there. That's been our house since. My mother passed away and then finally my father passed away. My older brother said, "You know, there's three of us still left. In order to divide the assets, we have to sell the house."

Anyway, I mentioned it to my son and my son said, "Hey, I'll buy the house and I'll rent it to you." (Chuckles) So he did. He bought the house from his grandfather's estate, took possession of the house, and I didn't have to move. I said I could move someplace. He said, "No, I want you to stay in the same house you grew up in."

WN: Good guy.

TY: Yeah. So he bought the house.

WN: That's a nice story. (TY laughs.) That really is.

So here you are growing up on Lāna'i from 1934. Tell me, what was the neighborhood like when you were growing up? What was the area like? What was it like for you as a kid?

- TY: You know, it's hard to believe but we had bathhouses. Every section of Lānaʻi [had a bathhouse]. There must have been over a dozen, where the community would come and bathe. Not shower, but they had a big redwood tub. I would say it was a little bit bigger than this cabinet—laid flat.
- WN: Okay. So this is about maybe . . .
- TY: Maybe twice as big as that.
- WN: So about eight feet by sixteen feet?
- TY: Yeah. And maybe about that deep.
- WN: Above your waist?
- TY: Waist deep.
- WN: How many people do you think it would hold at one time?
- TY: Probably held four or five people.
- WN: Four or five adults?
- TY: Yeah. They had shelves around the thing so you could sit up to here.
- WN: Like seats?
- TY: Yeah. It was like *furo* in Japan. They made it same concept. They had somebody to heat up the water every day.
- WN: How did they heat it up?
- TY: With heating oil.
- WN: With kerosene?
- TY: I don't know. It wasn't kerosene, it was some kind of diesel oil or something. I think they used motor oil, the kind when they change oil on the trucks and on all their vehicles. They saved it and they distributed it to these bathhouses.
- WN: Really?
- TY: Yeah. They used that and maybe they used other oils, but that's what it looked like to me.

They had big outhouses. (Laughs) A big house, divided in half. One side was male, the other side was female. Just a big hole.

WN: But it had seats though?

TY: Oh yeah.

WN: Made of wood.

TY: Yeah. They had one of those and a bathhouse right next to each other, or in close proximity for the entire people living around that area. If for some reason that was out, you have to jump in a car and go to the next one. You were allowed to use somebody else's bathhouse.

WN: So the bathhouse and the outhouse served your block?

TY: Exactly.

WN: How many families would you say it served in a block?

TY: Fifteen, twenty. Thirty maybe.

WN: How far was it from your house?

TY: It was just behind our house. We had a small bucket with soap and brush and something. We always took a clean towel.

WN: You'd take it with you?

TY: Take it and go. If my father happened to be home at the time, we might go together with the same bucket of soap and stuff. Wash and then hop in.

WN: Okay, so you wouldn't soap up in the tub?

TY: Oh no, no. It was like the Japanese *furo*.

WN: Did it have those low chairs or benches you sit down and scrub up? How did you scrub up?

TY: I think they did have something like that. It's kind of vague to me anymore.

(Laughter)

WN: But the main thing is you would go there. You would scrub up and wash up outside of the tub.

TY: Yeah.

WN: And go into the tub and soak.

TY: Yeah, and that was for Filipinos, Chinese, it didn't matter. Anybody that lived around it, they all came. Just like the Japanese *furo*.

WN: The women's side was the same thing?

TY: Yeah. They'd have the same thing on the women's side.

WN: Did the women have their own tub, or was it just a partition?

TY: No, it was one great big tub. They put a wall between the middle. So I think there was a connection between the two sides. When they heated up, everything is heated up.

WN: I see.

TY: But they had a big thing that looks like—I don't know but the fire in there was going (makes sound of a fire burning), it was . . .

WN: Bubbling.

TY: Yeah. The company paid, I think usually ladies, to operate the thing. They'd light up the fires every day at a certain time to heat up the water. It was twenty-four seven. They had somebody to take care of it.

WN: How often would they change the water?

TY: I have no idea.

(Laughter)

But the water was always clean. Maybe they emptied it out every day and refilled it. I don't know.

WN: The outhouses were like wooden seats?

TY: Yeah.

WN: And a hole.

TY: They had workers coming to spray that thing every week or whenever, to clean it out. Until about maybe after the war, right about the time the war was ending they started building a lean-to to each house with a shower, a toilet, and. . .

WN: Flush toilet?

- TY: Yeah, flush toilet, and a space for a washing machine and dryer. So it was only a small lean-to. But they added it to every home.
- WN: Prior to this lean-to coming up with the washer dryer—so dryer too? Was it dryer?
- TY: Yeah, but they also had—I didn't mention—a place to do laundry in this complex with the toilet and the bathhouse.
- WN: Prior to the lean-to being built? How did they do laundry?
- TY: They had people living around that area, the wives would come. They had washing machines, their own washing machines all covered up. If they didn't have washing machines, they had tubs with washing . . .
- WN: Washboard?
- TY: Washboard. With the grooves. You wash it by hand. People used to do that. They had lines to hang it, to hang the clothes.
- WN: So those big tubs were like metal tubs? Was it *tarai* they called it?
- TY: No, these were—let me draw it for you. It was something like. . . .
- They had hot and cold water. They filled it up. Then they put their washboard here.
- WN: On the side.
- TY: Then they'd scrub.
- WN: I see. So this is pretty deep. Like a basin, made of concrete.
- TY: It looked like it was made of something like that.
- WN: I know what you mean. Okay, I see.
- TY: So, we were real primitive here.
- WN: Did your mom wash for anybody else, like for the bachelors?
- TY: Yes. Absolutely. She did that all the way from when she was in Kohala. Even when we came here, she took in laundry. Then one day, [Hawaiian Pineapple Company] started hiring women to work in the pineapple fields, that's what she did. She worked in the pineapple fields afterwards.

WN: So she started out doing laundry for bachelor workers and then eventually worked out in the pineapple fields.

TY: Yeah.

WN: Sounds like a lot of hard work.

TY: Oh, she was a hard worker.

WN: What about your dad? Was he a hard worker too?

TY: Oh yeah. Working seven days a week for that period during the war. Working Saturdays and Sundays in the pineapple fields. Yeah, he was a hard worker.

He used to love fishing. Sometimes, even in the middle of the week at night, he would go fishing down at Kaumālapa‘u Harbor or even Mānele, and up around the coast.

During the war, if you were Japanese—of Japanese ancestry—you had to have a certain permit. You had to go down to the police station and obtain a permit to go down to the seashore to go fishing. This was during [19]42, [19]43, and maybe part of [19]44. You couldn’t stay overnight like me and my father used to do, like Friday and Saturday nights we used to spend overnight fishing all night. Or, fishing until after midnight and sleeping until the sun came up, then go fishing again. He would cut the fish in the evening and clean it up and stick it in the [tide] pond until morning. In the morning he would just lay it on the rocks to sun dry the fish.

WN: What kind of fish usually?

TY: Any kind of fish that we caught. That’s what we used to do. We used to dry the fish, and at the end of the next day we’d take home dried fish.

WN: Was it just you and your dad? What about your brother and siblings?

TY: They weren’t interested, no.

WN: So it was just you then?

TY: Yeah, just me. Until I was about maybe thirteen or fourteen. We used to go hiking over the mountain.

WN: Lāna‘i Hale?

TY: No, over. . . . Have you ever been to Mānele?

WN: Yeah.

TY: The harbor?

WN: Yeah.

TY: Have you ever gone to Maui?

WN: On the ferry?

TY: On the ferry.

WN: No.

TY: No? Anyway, as you're looking towards the ocean at Mānele, on the left side there's a big mountain. Big, high cliffs. We used to climb that. Follow the deer and goat trail going up to the top. Down the other side is like that.

WN: Steep.

TY: Very steep. So we just followed the trail—switchback trail—going all the way down. We used to stay overnight. Sometimes we'd go Friday and come back Sunday—Sunday afternoon—with dried fish. We used to go for a couple of days. We needed a permit if it was during the wartime. But they didn't want us to go overnight until near the end of the war. Then they more or less loosened the rules and they started letting us Japanese (chuckles) go freely without permits.

WN: The other ethnic groups didn't need permit?

TY: Oh, they didn't need it. (WN laughs.) No. Only if you were Japanese, you were a suspect. Potential saboteurs. (Laughs) Or spies.

WN: All you guys were doing was going fishing.

(Laughter)

TY: Yeah, that's all we wanted to do. There's some areas we used to go on this side—the north side of the island. We had to park the car way up on the hill and hike all the way down, maybe about two miles or so through the *kiawe* trees and stuff. We used to do that too.

WN: Was it mostly *kiawe* over there?

TY: Yeah. They were very strict. At the very beginning—oh man—we had to have permission from the police department, which was connected to the military that was over here. They made sure that you didn't go on your

own, fishing. They wanted to know when you were planning to come back—where are you going to be. We had to describe the location where we were going to be fishing. If the fish was biting real good at the time we said we were coming back, we had to quit and come back. (Chuckles) It's crazy.

WN: So you were about eight or nine when the war started, right?

TY: Yes, yes. Exactly.

WN: Do you remember what it was like going fishing before the war started?

TY: We just went.

WN: You just went?

TY: Yeah. But, I was nine years old. Maybe I didn't go until I was maybe eleven or twelve, until I was maybe fourteen, fifteen. When I went to high school, I know I didn't go fishing with him too much after that.

WN: So actually, the war years were the main times that you were going?

TY: Yeah.

WN: Four- or five-year period.

TY: You know, there was so much action in the South Pacific—ships being sunk and so forth. Whenever we went fishing anywhere around the island, there would always be rations that the troops ate. It was all covered with wax.

WN: You mean like what? Cans?

TY: No, packages. Paper, cardboard boxes. All sealed in wax. You cut it open and you find hardtack crackers. . . .

(Taping is interrupted, then resumes.)

WN: So you had hardtack crackers.

TY: Yeah. They had so many different kinds of breakfast-in-a-can, so to speak. Lunch, and dinner. Different kinds of meat.

WN: Like the K-rations or C-rations.

TY: Yes. C, K, B, different kinds of rations. They all had toilet paper. They even had cigarettes, believe it or not. It was all dry. The wax carton . . .

- WN: Protected it.
- TY: Yeah. It could have been floating in the ocean for months, and probably was floating in the ocean for months.
- WN: I see, so these are ones that you found washed up.
- TY: Yeah, from the ships being sunk. And life jackets, hundreds of them.
- WN: This is out by Shipwreck [Beach]?
- TY: Shipwreck and all along the Keōmuku, we called it.
- WN: Northern, north shore.
- TY: Yeah. All the way up to where you can see Lahaina and Kaho‘olawe. The beaches—if you walked you could find tons of it probably. Every time we went fishing, that’s the first thing I did. Whether it was a rocky coast or sandy beach, I’d walk along the coast and look for that and use it for our meals at night. (Laughs) Coffee—they had powdered coffee. Powdered coffee, sugar, and cream.
- WN: So these are like individual boxed meals [and necessities]?
- TY: Yeah. They had candies, toilet paper, cigarettes. I can’t remember if they had matches, but I don’t think they had matches. Because everybody had Zippo [lighters] you know, during the war. They had even can openers, in case you lost the key to open the can. They even had cakes and pudding in a can. I used to come back with armfuls of that stuff. Maybe with a life jacket—a nice, clean life jacket. (Laughs)
- WN: So these cans you could open with that key?
- TY: Yeah.
- WN: I see.
- TY: That or they had a small mechanical can opener, hand operated.
- WN: Boy, that’s a real treasure.
- TY: Today, I read somewhere and saw pictures of the can opener. They’re going for five, ten dollars each now. (WN laughs.) You could find hundreds of them in those days.
- WN: Did you keep anything?

- TY: I kept canned goods under the house for a long time (laughs), and I think when I came back on leave I went under there and pulled it all out and opened it all up. Hell, all of them was good yet. The crackers, crisp and crunchy.
- WN: Really?
- TY: Oh yeah. The inside of the can was immaculate. Outside might have a bit of rust. Chewing gum, they had so many different kinds of Wrigley chewing gums.
- WN: Great place for a kid—great thing for a kid to do.
- TY: Yeah. That's what I did the first thing we went to the seashore. While my father was fishing, I'd walk maybe one or two miles and then come back with a handful of our meal for the night. (Laughs)
- WN: That's a cool memory. Great memory.
- So during the war, were there troops [stationed] here on Lānaʻi?
- TY: Yes. There were I don't know how many. Maybe three or four hundred. Or maybe more, I don't know.
- WN: Were they here in Lānaʻi City or up . . .
- TY: Yeah, the company had housing for single men. Like dormitories that they rented out. Maybe it was free, with no rent. Right near the service station—the only service station.
- WN: Nishimura. Yeah.
- TY: Well, further on down was the housing for the single workers that stayed in there. What they did was—because there was plenty of spaces—they moved all the workers, I guess, together. Whatever is left, they let the army have it for their troops. About a year later, they built barracks going down to Kaumālapaʻu. All the troops moved down there. Down at Hulopoʻe Beach, you know how the beach is. . . . The hotel is over there now. Anyway, this is the beach, the water line is here. They erected a machine gun nest here, and another one over here.
- WN: Right on the beach.
- TY: Yeah, so they can shoot cross fire. In case any Japanese marines landed on the beach, they had a clear field of fire. But they had maybe two or three

rows of barbed wire right on the beach. So we couldn't use the beach during the war.

WN: Was that just Hulopo'e or was it all the beaches?

TY: No, not all the beaches. Because on the other side of the island, they'd have to go ten miles to string. Besides, that was protected by the reef. The reef, you could walk on. It's only about that deep.

WN: About a foot.

TY: Yeah, you walk out about a 50 or 100 yards, you're going to step onto the reef. So, they didn't have to worry about that. The landing crafts, if they had any, wouldn't be able to go beyond the reef anyways.

So they had two or three rows of barbed wire right across the beach. For about two-and-a-half, three years, nobody could use the beach until close to the end of the war, then I think they used bulldozers attached to the end of the barbed wire and they just yanked everything out of there. But still, even afterwards barbed wire was sticking out of the sand and the water for a while. I don't know how they pulled those out, but that's the way it was during the war, when the war first started.

WN: Changed the area quite a bit, the physical area.

TY: Yeah.

WN: The troops that were here, did you come into contact with them at all?

TY: Yeah. I was called "Tojo". (Laughs) "Hey, Tojo!"

WN: Really?

TY: We'd be walking close to the area of their camp, and some of them would call us "Japs".

WN: These are the soldiers?

TY: Yeah. But, there were other soldiers that were really good, you know. I remember me and a bunch of other kids going to the PX. They had candies that you can't find in our stores. Chewing gum, chocolates, and we'd go right up to the place and look at all the candies. The soldier standing behind there, he would feel sorry for us I guess and he would say, "If you got a nickel, I'll sell you whatever you want." It was only five cents for whatever. Practically anything you wanted. We used to run down there and look, "Oh, the guy is not working today." We'd come back some other time and we'll

see him, go up and buy stuff. (Chuckles) Chewing gum and candies and stuff for nickels, dimes.

WN: Some of the Lāna‘i people I talked to shined shoes. Did you do anything like that?

TY: No. No. I was too scared to interact with too many soldiers who might be hostile toward anybody that looks like Japanese, because some of them were hostile enough to call you a “Jap”. “Tojo”. “Hey Tojo, get out of here!” (Laughs) Stuff like that.

WN: Did you talk back to them at all?

TY: No, no, no.

WN: Of course, you were still a pretty young kid. About nine, ten, eleven years old.

TY: It was an interesting time.

WN: What was it like here growing up until you left Lāna‘i? In 1950 I guess.

TY: [Nineteen] fifty-one.

WN: What was it like? What kind of relationships did you have with say, the bosses and the families over here? You know, the pineapple company. Did you have any contact with them?

TY: No, I didn’t. But you know, there was no such thing as rent. Housing was free I believe. Then when the union [International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union] came in towards the end of the war. . . .

WN: Nineteen forty-seven I think, or [nineteen] forty-six.

TY: Whenever the union came in, they started charging rent (chuckles) for the houses. You know where the Bank of Hawai‘i is now, that used to be the housing office. You used to go over there to pay the rent each month. I don’t know what the rent was, but it must have been cheap. Like ten or fifteen bucks a month or whatever. I don’t think it was too much.

WN: Was your father a member of the union or was he management?

TY: He was a member of the union. During a strike—I believe it was [19]50 or [19]51.

WN: [Nineteen] fifty-one, yeah.

TY: He even went to Honolulu and worked as a welder for I don't know how long. Because, the strike was on for a long time. I don't know how long [seven months].

WN: I think only Lāna'i went out on strike.

TY: Maybe, I don't know.

WN: Were you still here when the strike took place?

TY: I believe I left just about the time the strike came on, or maybe soon after that. I can't remember. But I know the strike was on just about that time.

WN: Did you folks have gardens at your house?

TY: Oh yeah. My father had dug up over half the yard. We also had backyard poultry—chickens in the yard. He loved gardening, but I hate gardening.

(Laughter)

WN: What did he grow?

TY: He grew all kinds of vegetables. Cabbage, carrots, anything.

WN: This is all for home use only?

TY: Yeah.

WN: Did you have any chores that you had to do around the house?

TY: No. (Laughs)

WN: How many of you were there?

TY: I had my oldest brother, and two sisters. So there were four kids.

WN: And you were number?

TY: Number three.

WN: So you had older brother, older sister, you, younger sister.

TY: Yeah.

WN: I see.

TY: Now there's only my younger sister and myself. My younger sister is living in New Mexico. She's been living there since 1956 or something like that.

WN: Wow.

(Laughter)

TY: Married and has a family and everything over there. So, now whenever I go to Mainland, I try to visit her. Maybe I stay with her five days, a week, or something at a time.

WN: I forgot to ask, during the war did you folks have a bomb shelter?

TY: Yes. Yes.

WN: What was that like? Can you describe it for me, if you remember?

TY: It was just a trench that went maybe about five feet down or six feet down into the ground. Then my father started digging a tunnel. Went in about three feet, and then made a left turn. Went down a little further. Like a single room, way down on the bottom. But the first time we had big rain, heavy rain, it was flooded. (Laughs)

WN: Was there like provisions in there? Like cans?

TY: No, but we had provisions in boxes to take in there in case we had to abandon the house for whatever reason. Every family had an air raid shelter. Some people just dug a trench. Others built a ceiling covered with dirt. Others did what my father did. Just dig a hole and tunnel.

WN: Did you work in the pineapple fields?

TY: Oh yes.

WN: How old were you?

TY: Twelve years old. My pay I believe was something like thirty-five cents an hour. The war was still going on and I went to get my physical. I was so proud. (Laughs) I'm going to work and they gave me a number, aluminum tag with my work number. I forget what it was.

WN: They called it a *bangō*?

TY: Yeah.

WN: So you cannot remember your number?

TY: No.

(Laughter)

I don't remember what it was.

WN: So twelve years old was when you were allowed to work.

TY: Yeah. There was no such thing as child labor law then. (Laughs)

WN: So what did you do? What kind of work?

TY: Everything from picking pineapples to cutting grass. Especially in the summertime, it was never cutting grass, it was always picking pineapple. When you're twelve years old, you don't weigh even one hundred pounds. I didn't. We had these big bags we put the pineapples in. The weight of it would weigh—if I wasn't set and leaning a certain way, I couldn't put any pineapples in there without . . .

WN: Tipping over.

TY: Yeah.

WN: You mean it would be on your shoulder?

TY: Yeah. On one shoulder and the other shoulder is open. We used to put the pineapple and fill it up and leaning a certain way, and then putting it on your arms. Climbing up the hill to the road—to the first row—and dumping all the pineapple. Sometimes, going up to that place where you dump the pineapples next to the road, it was so heavy that the pineapple that's up against my hip would start crushing and all the juice would come down on my legs. My pants would be all wet. Because that pineapple happened to be a little bit on the ripe side and it's not as solid as a half-ripe one. After that I used to make sure that the one that was leaning up against my hip was kind of green.

WN: Were there any kind of rules as to what pineapples you pick?

TY: Yeah, after a while you would know which is a little bit too green that can be picked next week. You would know.

WN: About how many pineapples would fit in a bag, would you say?

TY: At least twenty-five.

WN: Wow.

- TY: If you put some more on your arms, you can put another half a dozen.
- WN: I see. So you're sort of loading up your elbow.
- TY: Yeah, and you put it under your elbow and you're holding it down and then you're putting some more on top.
- WN: Oh gee. Wow.
- TY: Otherwise you have to come back to that same row and continue. So, if you happened to complete that row, and you can pack all the pineapples in one trip, that's what you did.
- WN: Then you'd come back out . . .
- TY: Yeah, and go to the next row.
- WN: . . . and go to the next row. I see.
- TY: And pick whatever, until you come to the last row. Then you sit and cut the tops off and pack it in boxes.
- WN: Pack the fruit or the . . .
- TY: Yeah, the fruit. Stack the box and cut the top, pack another box. They used to count the boxes. You know just about how many is in each box. That's how they paid you.
- WN: Oh, you got paid by the number of boxes.
- TY: Yeah. Number of pineapples you picked.
- WN: In addition to thirty-five cents an hour?
- TY: Yeah, in addition.
- WN: So thirty-five cents an hour plus.
- TY: But it was just pennies.

(Laughter)

You didn't make any money, you know.

WN: After you would finish all your rows, then you would start to cut?

TY: Cut the tops off, and then pack it. After you're done with that, the *luna* assigned you another section, then you go all the way again.

WN: Where would you leave the tops?

TY: Just leave it on the ground. Somebody would come and they would, I don't know, load it up in bags or what. But they would use the tops to plant.

WN: Did the *lunas* get on you, you know, "Can you hurry it up a little?"

TY: Yeah, yeah. But we ignored them mostly.

(Laughter)

WN: Who were the *lunas* usually? Were these like full-time workers?

TY: Yeah. Then when I guess about thirteen years old, me and a classmate—two classmates—decided we didn't want to work. (Laughs) So went to the *luna* and said we don't feel too good, so we're going to go home. They couldn't stop anybody from leaving, in case they really were sick. But the *luna*, he knew we were just—three of us being sick at the same time.

(Laughter)

So, I think *pau hana* was something like three o'clock in the afternoon. This was about nine or ten o'clock in the morning. We still had our full lunch. So the three of us, we hiked all the way back to the edge of town and we cut around and went up into the mountains. (Laughs) Spent the rest of the day. Eat our lunch, and look at the time, "Oh, it's almost *pau hana*," so we can't go back until maybe about 3:15, 3:20.

WN: Oh, for the truck?

TY: For the truck to be taking all the people out of the fields and back to the drop-off point, which is right in the middle of town there. So just about *pau hana* time, we'd wait about fifteen or twenty minutes and then we'd start hiking back down and go home. When I got home, my mother was waiting for me. Like this.

WN: Arms crossed. (Laughs)

TY: She just . . .

WN: How did she know?

TY: They reported it.

(Laughter)

Of course they were going to report it. This happened to me on a Friday, and on Fridays we didn't have school because they needed workers to help the war effort. They allowed anybody who worked part time Saturdays—I think it was only Saturdays—anybody that worked Saturdays can work Friday and Saturday. You didn't have to go to school. Unless you didn't go to work. If you didn't go to work, you've got to report to school.

WN: So what did you do?

TY: Like I said, I think it was on a Friday, because the company had to notify the school of who was present. But since we left about nine or ten o'clock, they reported to the school and the school called my parents and let my parents know he left sick at nine-thirty this morning. (Laughs) So my mother was waiting, mad as hell, and just chewed the hell out of me. "You're going to go to school, Monday. Tell them and explain yourself," because they wanted to know if I was really sick. Needless to say, I never did it again. (Laughs)

WN: So that day you cut out of work and school.

TY: Yeah.

(Laughter)

WN: Two places at once.

TY: I don't know about my classmates, but man, I really caught hell. My father came home from work and my mother told him what happened. I got chewed by him.

(Laughter)

WN: So how many summers did you actually work?

TY: Up until 1949. Every summer until 1949, I worked. Nineteen fifty, after I got out of high school, I started working for the contractors.

WN: Right, right. Were there any things that the community did to get together, sponsored by the company or church or anything like that that you folks would have?

TY: The company had—I believe it was Thanksgiving. Every Thanksgiving Day, the company had free food at the baseball grounds. The whole town would come, and the company would have—I forget what it was. They had

a big day. I don't know if they had beer, but I know they had soda. I don't know who prepared all the goodies, but once a year they had that. I believe it was on Thanksgiving.

WN: What about New Year's? Did you folks do anything Christmas, New Year's?

TY: Yeah, there was the usual. New Year's, because of the Japanese custom of having a New Year's bath in the morning, they had everybody who was assigned to the bathhouses to light it up, I think the night before, New Year's Eve. So that in the morning, we can follow our custom. (Laughs)

WN: But normally they wouldn't do that?

TY: No. It was usually in the afternoon they would light it up. Or, in the morning or lunchtime.

WN: So normally you folks would take a bath at night, after work.

TY: Yeah.

WN: I see. But New Year's Day was different.

TY: Yeah. I know that because my aunt used to take care of our washhouse. She used to light the heater to heat up the water. Every afternoon, maybe eleven or twelve she would light it up. By four o'clock, five o'clock when everybody was home, taking a bath it would be hot.

(Taping is interrupted, then resumes.)

WN: What were we talking about? New Year's. Was it New Year's? Anyway, what was school like at Lāna'i [High and] Elementary [School]? Were you a good student?

TY: No, I was never a good student. I used to get notes to my parents every report card, saying my writing was atrocious (chuckles).

WN: You mean handwriting.

TY: Yeah. It was constantly a complaint about she can't understand what I'm writing and I need to improve my writing.

WN: You're talking about penmanship?

TY: Yeah. My father left school when he was fifteen. He never finished eighth grade. But one thing he was good at was writing. He had very neat, nice

handwriting. So, when he kept getting notes from the teacher about my writing, he got a tablet similar to this. He wrote down, A, B, C, D, E, F, until Z. He said, just follow that and also do some exercises. This way, that way.

WN: Oh, you mean talking about making loops?

TY: Yeah, making loops and circles. (Laughs) Every night, he sat me down and I had to do all figure eights.

WN: Interesting.

TY: It did improve my handwriting to the point that people were complimenting me about my handwriting after that. Never had problems since. For a guy like my father who never passed the eighth grade, now when I think back about it, it was remarkable. Whenever I was in the military and I wrote home, I didn't write home to my mom, because my mother didn't read English. I wrote to my father, and he wrote to me. He always had a very neat writing style.

WN: I saw the postcard you sent from Cuba. Cute postcard they were passing it around over there, and it was very nice writing.

(Laughter)

TY: So to this day, I have my father to thank to improve my handwriting.

WN: While you were going to school, or high school especially, did you have any aspirations as to what you wanted to do?

TY: My daydream was traveling. Since I was maybe twelve or thirteen, I read about Machu Picchu, about the Taj Mahal, Angkor Wat, the Sphinx, Pyramids. That really fascinated me and I was constantly down to the library looking at pictures and daydreaming about someday traveling. Isn't that funny? Strange, but yeah, that was my aspiration.

WN: Coming from a small, small community like this to have that kind of dream is . . .

TY: Unusual.

WN: Well, I don't know about unusual. Maybe being from a small place sort of spurred it on.

TY: Maybe. Maybe. But I was constantly thinking, someday when I retire, or even if I can afford it when I'm not retired, I'm going to go travelling someplace.

WN: And you did.

TY: Even when I was in the military I did everything I could so that I could travel. Did I tell you I was stationed on Guam?

WN: Right.

TY: I hated that place. Mosquito bites every day. No place to go. At night, the only thing you could do was go to the movies. The movies were outdoors, down on a hill, and the screen was down on the bottom of the hill. There were wooden benches on the hill. The projection room was way up on top. Half of the time, it was raining. You got drenching wet. You're scratching all the time—mosquitos and moths. Oh, I hated that place.

I kept thinking, "I can't stay here. I got to go to Japan," because we were a detachment from the outfit in Tokyo. We were a small detachment. We only had maybe about forty, fifty people I guess. We were stationed at the naval air station in a navy base. I thought, "How in the heck can I get a transfer out of here?"

As soon as I mentioned transfer, all the sergeants started laughing. "You'll never get a transfer out of here. You've got to have a good reason, otherwise you'll never get out of here."

We had a master sergeant in our Quonset hut. The end of the Quonset hut was blocked off. There was one door. There was a room for the master sergeant. I knocked on his door, and I say, "Hey Sarge. Can I talk to you for a minute?"

He says, "Yeah, come in."

So I sat down. I said, "I'm thinking about going to the CO to ask for a transfer to Tokyo."

He said, "Why?"

I told him, "I just can't stay here." (Laughs)

WN: This is during the Korean War?

TY: Yeah. Height of the Korean War. He said, "If you're in the military, any branch of the service, it's next to impossible. They will give you a transfer

if your wife in San Francisco is very, very sick. Like she's got cancer or she's got something that's long term. Then they might approve a transfer to an air base right near San Francisco. Otherwise, it's next to impossible. Because you're in the military, you're not going to be granted a transfer just because you don't like the place here."

I said, "Yeah. I realize that."

He said, "Well, think of a good excuse for something that will help the air force. Your branch of service. Think up something."

WN: You were in the army?

TY: Air force.

WN: Oh, you were in the air force? I'm sorry.

TY: And so, for about two, three weeks a month I thought about it. I said, "Okay, I've come up with a plan. I'm going to tell them." I know a lot of Japanese at that time because my mother hardly spoke English. She spoke to us in Japanese most of the time. Otherwise, pidgin. Pidgin English. But I knew a little bit of Japanese. I'm going to tell the CO that I understand Japanese well enough to converse. (Laughs)

WN: Did you?

TY: No. Hell no.

(Laughter)

I'm going to tell them that, and besides that, I got in my service records that my religion is Buddhism. I'm going to tell them there's no Buddhist churches here.

(Laughter)

Yeah. I'm going to tell them I know the Japanese culture, because of my background. I can speak and understand Japanese and I understand the culture. Therefore, I would be an asset more to the air force if I was stationed in Japan than here. Besides that, if I was stationed in Japan, I could continue practicing my religion.

WN: Your family was a member of the Buddhist church here?

TY: The only reason I listed my religion as Buddhist is because they were Buddhist. There were two guys, Sadao Morimoto and James Sakai. James

Sakai was from Honolulu. Sadao Morimoto was Lānaʻi boy as well. All three of us had the same background—Buddhist. So I talked to them. I said, “Hey, what do you say we get together and go see the CO and ask for a transfer?” They heard what the sergeant said. It’s almost impossible. He might even laugh you out of his office if you ask for a transfer and don’t come up with a good reason. So they didn’t want any part of it.

Morimoto told me, “I’m going to go see my wife and my kid going back to Honolulu on leave in a couple of days, so count me out.”

I said okay. James Sakai didn’t want any part of it. I don’t know why, but he said, “No, no. You go ahead.”

I said “Okay. All he can say is no. If he says no, what have you lost?” Nah, he didn’t want to. If I had somebody else with me, I would feel a little more secure I guess. But, going alone I didn’t give myself much chance of succeeding.

Anyway, I went to see him. I said I would like to request a transfer to our headquarters in Tokyo.

He says, “Why? Don’t you like Guam?”

I said, “Yes, I enjoy being here. But, I have a problem that I’m a Buddhist. This is a predominantly Catholic island. There are no Buddhist temples here as there were in Hawaiʻi when I was back there. In Japan, 90 percent of the people are Buddhist and there’s Buddhist temples I could go to worship every Sunday if I wanted to. Besides that, I know the culture because of my background. I understand Japanese. I can make myself understood in Japanese. I understand what they are saying to me if they speak to me. In that way, I can be more of an asset to the air force if I was there, rather than here.”

Right away, he said, “Well, I’m going to have to check with them. If they can send me a relief, somebody to relieve you here to take your place. I’ll cut orders for you to be transferred.”

I said, “Thank you, sir!” Five days later, I was in Tokyo.

WN: Wow, good for you.

TY: Two days after that, they got word. “Yes. Send him over. We’ll send you a man to take his place.” About one month later, James and Sadao came to Japan.

(Laughter)

I said, “See? I told you guys! You could have been here a month ago.”

WN: That’s a great story. So you were discharged in [19]55, then you reenlisted in [19]56?

TY: Yeah.

WN: Then you were discharged again in 1960.

TY: Nineteen sixty, yeah.

WN: Then you lived in LA for thirty years. You were working for Ralphs Grocery.

TY: Yeah. (Laughs)

WN: Anyway, we don’t have time to get into all that, but I just wanted to ask you—you returned to Lāna‘i in 1991. Why did you do that?

TY: My brother suggested it. He said, “You’re divorced. You live alone. Here I got the restaurant and everything here.”

WN: Which restaurant is this?

TY: Well, his family still got the restaurant. He passed away since 2000 I think. Anyway, they’re still running the restaurant, but it’s a Japanese restaurant.

WN: Where is this?

TY: In Alameda, California. He was really making money hand over fist at that time. But anyway, he was working for the navy and in Japan he was actually a big shot. He was a civilian head of the navy ships. Not the battleships or destroyers, but supply ships—cargo ships. That’s what he was head of for the entire Pacific. When the Vietnam War heated up, he was really busy scheduling ships here and there to supplies and all that. He was going to Australia, he was going to Vietnam, Bangkok, Washington D.C., San Diego. He was equal to one or two stars if he was in the navy. Anyway, he went to Germany. There was an opening in Germany that he heard about, and he wanted to expand his experience I guess. So he took his family to Germany in the [19]70s and he stayed there for seven or eight years I guess. Then he came back and was working in Alameda at the naval base down there.

Then, when he acquired the restaurant and stuff, he retired. So, after he retired I think he was getting something like \$5,000 a month pension from the navy—\$5,000 month, on top of that he was paying himself \$5,000 a

month from the restaurant, that's the kind of money he was making. His wife was hostess. She was getting \$5,000 a month. His son—my nephew—also worked there and he was getting \$5,000 a month. They were making big money. He told me that they're almost pushing ninety, and somebody should be there to keep an eye on them.

So I said, "I just retired." In fact, I didn't retire but I called Ralphs Grocery Company and I told them, "Hey, I quit."

(Laughter)

I told them I quit and I retired and put in for my pension. I was just kicking back in LA.

So he called me one day and he said, "The folks are pushing ninety, so we need somebody over there, and you're the only one. You're divorced."

WN: But your parents were on Lānaʻi still.

TY: So I said, "I don't want to, but I'll do it." My sister can't do it because she's got her family in New Mexico. He can't do it. So I said I'll go back. So that's when I came back. It wasn't a bad idea that I came back, because I learned so many things. I make things with my hands, which I never did when I was in California. I make a lot of things like pendants, for women. Earrings. I make canes and hiking sticks. Carved, you know.

WN: Right. I've seen those.

TY: You've seen them?

WN: I was over at your house last year.

TY: You were?

WN: Yeah.

TY: (Laughs) I forgot already!

WN: You gave me something.

TY: Did I give you?

WN: Yeah, something. I forget now. Anyway, I have something.

TY: So what did you do with it?

WN: I don't know. I probably have it.

(Laughter)

I'm not sure if you gave me anything, but I remember seeing some of your work. You said that you sell it in Hale'iwa [O'ahu] or some place.

TY: Yeah, that's the only place I sell it at. Otherwise, half of the time I'm giving it away.

WN: I just wanted to close by asking you—you were reluctant to come back to Lāna'i, and now you say that you were kind of glad that you did come back.

TY: Yeah, because otherwise I would never have been able to see what I could do with my hands. It was only because I was here that I started doing those things.

WN: Let me ask you—you were gone from 1951 to [19]91. Forty years, actually.

TY: Yeah.

WN: What changes did you see? What was different about Lāna'i when you came back in [19]91, if you remember, if anything?

TY: Pretty much the same, actually. (Laughs) Except for the new hotels.

WN: Because you came back and did work for Mānele Bay [Hotel].

TY: Yeah. I worked for Mānele Bay. I was about three months at home with my parents and just sitting around, eating their food. (Chuckles) I did start carving canes, because the first few days I was here I went up to the boonies and looked around and I found guava sticks that looked like it might be made into a cane with a handle and everything. After about three months, my mother says, "You're just going to have to leave. You can't be here eating our food for free. And here I'm making your bed every morning, doing your laundry, and you're retired and you're not even sixty-five yet. Your father worked until he was sixty-five, and you should do the same. Go and apply for a job at the hotel and live at the dormitory and eat at the cafeteria, because I'm almost ninety years old and I don't want to do your laundry, make your bed, and pick up after you anymore. People probably are talking. You're not sixty-five and you're sitting on your butt and eating our food." (Laughs) But I was glad she kicked me out, because I found out it was \$120 and I got room and board for \$120 a month. Two meals a day at the cafeteria, and one meal lunch at the hotel.

WN: What did you do? What was your job?

TY: My job was maintenance. I took care of, they call Ahi Ahi [Hale Ahi Ahi Lounge]. The bar. I did the floor, the carpeting, and the linoleum floor. The tables, I cleaned off the tables. Vacuumed the carpets. Cleaned up. Then I went downstairs to the Hulopo'e restaurant and I did the same thing down there in the afternoon until *pau hana*, and then I came home. That was my job. If it wasn't for the job, I don't think I would be where I am today.

WN: Did you ever consider going back to LA.?

TY: I have, yeah. But then, I thought I need a place. Right now I have that little shed, the tool shed, that I work out of. But if I go back to LA., I would need something like that to spend my time doing something. Otherwise, what am I going to do? Thinking about it, it would be too hard rent-wise and so forth. I'd need a car, I'd need a rental. If I rented, it would be a question of whether the landlord would allow me to do stuff like that. Grinding ivory, all the dust. So, I'm more or less stuck here. (Laughs) But that's okay.

WN: One final question is, what do you think the future of Lāna'i is? You have a new owner now, who has plans. What would you like to see in terms of the future of this island?

TY: If they put up the windmills and it reduces the amount of money we have to pay for electricity, I'm all for it, for having the windmills and stuff. But, I don't think Maui Electric would consider lowering the electric bill.

WN: That's one of the big problems that the windmills—there's no guarantee that they're going to help you guys.

TY: Yeah.

WN: Okay, I think that's. . . .

TY: So you even came down to my house to see the. . .

WN: Yeah.

TY: I don't remember that.

WN: Anyway. We'll end it here. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

Lāna‘i:

Reflecting on the Past; Bracing for the Future

Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
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